

BUNYAN'S COMPUTER

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The following is by Pastor Buddy Smith, Grace Baptist Church, Malanda, Queensland, Australia < smiles@tpg.com.au> --

John Bunyan's name is familiar to most Christians. Some months ago I came across one of his short books, 'The Acceptable Sacrifice'. It was originally a sermon based on Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise". It was his last book.

My heart was deeply moved by this book. Not only is the content impressive, weighty and convincing, but Bunyan's grasp and use of Scripture is amazing. The book is absolutely compelling simply because of his knowledge of the Word of God. This was no contemporary sermon consisting of a joke, three points and a poem. This is a cobalt bomb in hardcover and the reader stands at ground zero.

My heart began shouting questions, "How did he write such a sermon? Where did he get such substance, such wisdom, such power? What did he use for study aids to be able to compile such a masterpiece?" In the midst of these questions I realized Bunyan had almost none of the resources we use everyday. Strong's Concordance was 200 years in the future, Cruden's a hundred. Thayer's, Gesenius, and Robertson were all unknown. Bunyan's biographers mention Luther's commentary on Galatians, Foxes Book of Martyrs, and an anonymous concordance. We suppose that Bunyan, the prolific writer, would be a voracious reader. But there is the one resource book, his chief study aid he mentions again and again. Hear him: "As I was sitting by the fire...suddenly...this word sounded in my heart, 'I must go to Jesus'. I said, 'Wife, is there ever such a scripture, I must go to Jesus?' Thus unexpectedly questioned, she cannot tell".

"Therefore," says Bunyan, "I sat musing to see if I could remember such a place. I had not sat above two or three minutes but it came bolting in upon me, 'You are come to Mt Zion...and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament' - Heb. 12:22-24". This, then, was Bunyan's chief resource, his chief study aid, the Holy Scriptures themselves, taught him by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

He thoroughly knew the Scriptures. He memorised long passages. He meditated much upon the Word. He looked and longed and lingered until the Holy Spirit brought to mind the needed truth for each crisis. He knew by daily experience the truth of John 14:26,

"But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost...He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance..."

Bunyan used this resource when discouraged. He used it when he prepared sermons. He used it when he stood before magistrates, accused of preaching without a license. He used it when in jail where he began writing Pilgrim's Progress. He used it when he preached from his cell window. He used it when he pointed the lost to Christ. This is Bunyan's secret: the Spirit and the Word - the sufficiency of Scripture! The Comforter, who is our tutor, was Bunyan's best study aid. His utter dependence upon the Word of God and its Author is what gave his life and literature their impact.

What a contrast he makes with the modern minister! Somewhere between the TV sports show, the trip to the airport, and the golf game, he must prepare his message. No problem! Just light up the new IBM (Inspired Business Machines?), and open the Super Sermon Maker Program. Memorisation, meditation and midnights are displaced by gigabytes, nanoseconds and mousy sermons. No blood, no sweat, no tears, no Bible, no prayer, no blessing, no people, too bad, so sad! ("No message tonight, folks. The computer is down.") Study aids? Sure, but used sparingly, remembering that no man's thoughts, programs, floppies, or CD ROMS can ever compare with the Word and the Spirit.

Bunyan's computer is still available, but it's expensive. It will cost the user time. Time in the Word. Time learning to humble our hearts before Him. Time in prayer, seeking the will of God for the sermons we must preach. Time waiting on God for truth. Time to grow godly character.

Is the price too high? Not if your sermons can still be a blessing after 300 years.

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